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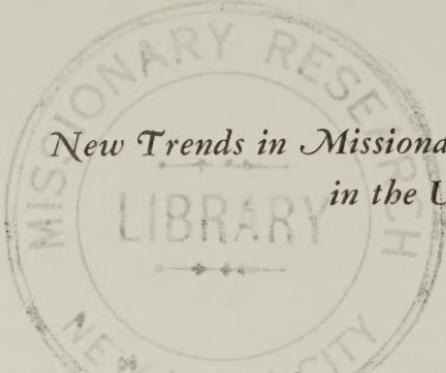
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# *New Trends in Missionary Training in the United States*

*A paper prepared by the  
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## New Trends in Missionary Training in the United States

Mission boards in the United States face acute problems in recruiting, selecting and training missionaries. The present situation, different from that which prevailed a generation ago, arises from a combination of conditions, both in America and abroad. In America, there is remarkable interest in religion, in a time of great prosperity. Few mission boards have serious financial problems, but all face a shortage of candidates qualified to be missionaries.

In the past, American mission boards have not taken missionary training *really* seriously. There is ample evidence, in reports and in excellent pamphlets on aspects of missionary preparation, that the most responsible mission leaders knew what *ought* to be done. Several good missionary training institutions were established. But in spite of the existence of such schools, mission boards never insisted that *all* candidates submit to special training. Consequently, only a minority of new missionaries appointed have had well planned orientation courses, or a period of study in a training school.

Present day candidates are sincere, but too many are religiously illiterate. Few have been accustomed to discipline or hardship. They are products of the American way of life, well trained technically, with a good secular education, and perhaps influenced more, if unconsciously, by advertising than by Christian teaching. Such candidates receive ruder shocks when they go abroad than did earlier missionaries. In recent years this combination of factors has resulted in a considerable percentage of missionaries resigning after a short period of service overseas. This situation and a clearer realization of the dimensions of the task faced today have combined to stir the boards to action. They are now aware that candidates must be helped to prepare for the adjustment to life in a revolutionary situation overseas, so different from life in America. It is the new situation, in America and overseas, which necessitates new emphases in missionary training.

## THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

It is natural that the young American missionary who comes to maturity in the nineteen fifties is a product of the American way of life. Such a young person will certainly have had a deep religious experience, and spiritual motivation to apply for missionary service. But no matter how genuine the religious experience, modern young people have grown up amid the materialism and technological achievements characteristic of North America in this century.

The typical young American is a person expert in the practical techniques of living. He has always been accustomed to the various appliances to be found in every home, and almost certainly to the use of an automobile. In all this there is nothing that any young American need be ashamed of. The material and technical progress which has been achieved in North America is being shared as widely as possible with people of other nations. The high standard of living in America, and the mastery of scientific techniques are notable and admirable achievements. But technological mastery does not necessarily imply possession of wisdom, nor wealth and comfort denote a Christian civilization.

It is important that the modern young American should try to understand himself as the product of his environment. The American school and university systems have quite properly been planned to prepare young people for life in North America, but not necessarily for life in other countries.

## THE RELIGIOUS ILLITERACY OF TODAY'S CANDIDATE

Most missionary candidates of the present day shock their elders by their ignorance about the Bible and about missionary and church history. No one who has dealt with modern missionary candidates would question their sincerity, or their Christian character. But they know surprisingly little about the Bible. This is true, not only of medical, agricultural and educational missionaries, but also of many seminary graduates.

While most missionary candidates are firm in their faith in Jesus Christ as Master and Lord, they do not know as much as earlier generations of missionaries about Christian history and doctrine. Furthermore, few of them have read much about the missionary work of their own denominations. Not many are familiar with missionary biography. Fewer still are aware of the steps which have

led to the growth and development of the Younger Churches.

Missionaries are often appointed after a fairly short relationship to the candidate departments of their mission boards. There is nothing today to compare with the kind of continuous missionary education received a generation ago by those who were members of Student Volunteer bands on college campuses. Nowadays, to fill in the gaps in their missionary preparation, candidates need to spend considerable time in Bible study and in acquiring information about what has already been accomplished by the church in the country to which they are going.

#### MISSIONARY SERVICE IN A REVOLUTIONARY AGE

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the new missionary training is that part of it which might be called "preparing young American Christians for the first shocks of service abroad in a revolutionary age." Every young American missionary, if he has not already been abroad in military service or in some other capacity, should be helped to understand some of the common assumptions about the American way of life, and the challenge to these assumptions by people of almost every other nation.

It is almost impossible to prepare people *fully* for the situations they will meet when they begin their service overseas. Nevertheless, much can be done through emphasis upon the difference between conditions in North America and those which prevail abroad. Wise advice can help to soften the blows which sensitive and idealistic young Americans will inevitably receive when they leave their own country. It is natural, and right, that young Americans should be proud of their nationality and their heritage. At the same time, the often silent challenge to their ideas and their assumptions, and some resentment due to their high standard of living, will demand both patience and grace.

Perhaps what is most difficult for Americans to understand and to tolerate is the ingratitude of people who are obviously the beneficiaries of American goodwill. It takes unusual imagination and also Christian grace not to be irritated to the point of breaking relationships with friends abroad when the United States is criticized and sometimes vilified for the finest things it has done. The criticism comes not only from non-Christians, but often from fellow-Christians who owe much to Christian education and benevolence.

Another very difficult thing for young Americans to understand and to accept is the indifference of many people in other countries, including Christians, to Communism. Most Americans believe that Communism is wrong and that nothing good can come out of Russia or any other Communist country. While people in Asia and Africa may not be pro-Russian or pro-Communist, many of them do not share the American opposition to, and fear of, Communism. Most of them, if not pro-Communist, want to be neutral.

In preparing missionary candidates for the situation outlined above, one of the most helpful ways that has been found is to bring the candidates into personal contact during orientation periods with some of the ablest and most sympathetic Christians of other countries. An Asian or African Christian who understands and appreciates the American way of life can explain how his people feel about Americans, and particularly American missionaries, much better than an American is able to do.

#### NATURE OF THE NEW TRAINING, IN THE LIGHT OF CANDIDATES' NEEDS

The new types of missionary training or orientation are designed to supplement the general and professional education of the new missionary. The main emphasis is on building a bridge between the situation out of which the candidate comes, and that to which he goes. The training requires serious and disciplined acquisition of knowledge, but in an atmosphere of missionary fellowship and group living. This is in contrast to the emphasis of a few years ago when a major effort was made to discover and recommend the best courses and institutions for missionary training. Less than ten years ago, it is fair to say that the concern was to provide the missionary with useful information and techniques. Today, knowledge and technical skill are not discounted, but right attitudes and preparation for the strains of missionary living are singled out for primary emphasis.

The various new orientation courses for missionaries, while differing in details and in relative emphasis upon elements in the program, are all concerned, as missionary preparation must always be, with some basic needs. While it is assumed that no mission board would have appointed a candidate lacking in sound motivation, everything possible is done during the training period to strengthen the motivation and to keep before the new appointees the mis-

sionary's central and permanent task -- the communication of the Gospel by word and deed. Every course stresses the biblical basis of the Christian mission, the relation between Christianity and other religions and above all the missionary's personal knowledge of the Bible for his devotional life. Attention is focussed upon the revolutionary, unstable and perhaps extreme nationalistic situation into which the missionary goes. Much emphasis is laid upon the delicate relationship between the missionary and his National colleagues in his country of service. Every course includes some expert lectures on cultural anthropology, and an introduction to the study of a new language.

One of the most common causes for early withdrawal of missionaries, after appointment to work abroad, is inability to live and work harmoniously with missionary and National colleagues. In recent years many mission boards have required candidates to take psychological tests and in some cases to have psychiatric interviews as part of the routine selective procedure in an effort to discover if the persons concerned are emotionally stable. An important element in the new orientation program is that the new missionaries live and work together during their period of study. If it is apparent that some people are unable to adjust to the strains involved in living with a group of other American candidates, the decision to appoint them is carefully reviewed.

#### RELATION OF NEW TRAINING PROGRAMS TO EXISTING FACILITIES

Some explanation is required regarding the relation between the new orientation or training courses, and existing missionary training institutions and courses. In the first place, only a minority of missionary candidates took advantage of available training courses in institutions. For the past fifty years a number of excellent courses, planned for missionary candidates, have been offered by universities and colleges. Some institutions, such as The Kennedy School of Missions, Scarritt College for Christian Workers and the Canadian School of Missions, were established for the preparation of missionary candidates and the specialized training of missionaries on furlough. In addition, universities such as Cornell and Yale have planned courses for missionaries in agriculture and language studies. All these, and many others, have been known to mission boards, recommended by the Missionary Personnel Committee, and by missionaries to each other. But on the whole, mission-

ary training, beyond the professional standards required by the boards, has been an option and not mandatory. Consequently, there has not been the maximum of cooperation between mission boards and training institutions. It was natural that the training colleges should plan courses with emphasis on qualification for a degree and not always primarily on specific relevance to missionary work. The many new courses offered in area studies, language, anthropology and other subjects by American universities are often useful for missionaries, but not primarily planned for them.

The courses planned for missionaries in the past have covered such subjects as comparative religion, area studies, phonetics, linguistics and language instruction, anthropology, agriculture and other subjects. There has not been emphasis, except indirectly, upon what appears as the major new need today -- the preparation of the young American missionary for life in a revolutionary world. The lack of a joint and coordinated plan for new missionary training, carried out in full consultation between missionary training colleges and mission boards, has now resulted in the organization of a number of new training programs, many of them conducted by denominations. Some of the problems, and also positive accomplishments in missionary training, will be clearer as new projects are described in the following paragraphs.

#### THE MEADVILLE MISSIONARY TRAINING CONFERENCE

In the summer of 1953 a new interdenominational orientation program for missionary candidates was begun, and it has been continued for a six week period in each year since. This is under the auspices of the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The boards which send missionaries to Meadville for training had been accustomed to holding a one week Outgoing Missionary Conference each year. The interdenominational pattern, and an outline for a curriculum were already accepted. Moreover, the boards which decided to support the new and more costly summer program felt the need of something more substantial than a one week fellowship gathering.

Planning for the Meadville program was not only influenced by experience in earlier years in the Outgoing Missionary Conferences, but also by two denominational six week orientation courses. These were the training programs of the Presbyterian Church US, conducted each summer at Montreat, North Carolina, and the Methodist pro-

gram for short term appointees, now conducted at Scarritt College in Nashville, Tennessee. Both of these training programs were in operation some years before the Meadville Conference started in 1953. Much was learned from the experience already gained in these two orientation courses, since their aims, and the curriculum worked out to achieve them, were similar to the Meadville plan. Moreover, there was careful consideration as to whether these two groups of missionary candidates should be sent to Meadville.

On a number of grounds, including the important factor of keeping the group of trainees small enough so that intimate fellowship would be likely to result, it was decided to conduct all three six week courses during approximately the same period, from late June until the end of July. It would be generally agreed that the great advantage of the Meadville plan is that missionaries of several denominations live and work together, bound by a common faith and purpose. Moreover, the Meadville program attracts, each year, leaders of the world church from many countries. Such men and women are challenged by the opportunity to share the best they can give in an interdenominational training conference.

The Meadville program was planned by the Missionary Personnel Committee of the Division of Foreign Missions in the winter of 1952, with ten years of experience in running the one week Outgoing Missionary Conferences as a general guide. The aim of the committee was to provide the most helpful and practical orientation for missionaries under appointment that could be accomplished in six weeks. It was decided to hold the conference on a college campus in a convenient location. A tuition fee is charged, sufficient to insure that the director will be able to invite the very best leaders. The numbers are kept to about 125. In a group larger than this it is difficult for the young missionaries to establish the personal relationships with each other and with staff members which are among the greatest values of the conference.

The curriculum consists of four elements. Bible study occupies the first hour each morning. It is planned so that the teaching is equally helpful to seminary graduates and others at the conference who have not had theological training. The lectures are inspirational, and helpful in outlining methods of Bible teaching for all who will be teaching Bible classes.

A second part of the curriculum, and in a sense the theme of the whole conference, is "The Missionary Task." This deals with the

biblical basis of the Christian mission, Christianity and other religions, the place of the missionary in the church overseas, the wide range of missionary responsibility and many practical issues, such as standards of living, health problems and the relation of the missionary to his own government and that of the country in which he is working.

The first few days are always spent in area study groups. At this time, the conference is divided into sections on Africa, India, the Near East, Latin America and East Asia. The leaders of these groups are Christian Nationals from the country or area concerned, as well as missionaries. Every year the life of the conference community has been stimulated and enriched by the presence of inspiring Christians from several countries. At the beginning of the conference, the young people meet in small units with fellow missionaries of various denominations, going to the same country or continent. Friendships begun at Meadville continue to deepen when the personal contacts are re-established in various parts of the world.

About half the time at Meadville is spent in a course which introduces all members of the group to the study of a new language. The course is taught by the most competent experts on the continent. Phonetics, language structure and an introduction, in small classes, to the beginning of one of seven or eight languages, prove of great help when the long period of language study is begun on the field.

For about a third of those in attendance, the Meadville course is all the missionary training they receive. For the remainder, it concludes their training or precedes a term or a year of specialized preparation. The value of the course, given the validity of its objectives, consists in the impact of the personality and the expert knowledge of the leaders upon the new missionaries. The testimony of those who have been at Meadville, and then begun their work abroad is that little they have experienced has surprised them — they were prepared for it at Meadville. The most important by-products of the Meadville course are the fellowship experience in an interdenominational group dedicated to a common purpose, and the stimulus to many missions which do not send candidates to Meadville to set up something which will achieve the same purpose.

## PRESBYTERIAN STUDY FELLOWSHIP AND WORKSHOP FOR APPROVED CANDIDATES

In 1955, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church, USA, initiated, after long consideration, \*“a new plan whereby those candidates whose applications have been approved will have an opportunity, before going to the field, to acquire a better understanding of all that is involved in mission service, form a closer relationship with the Board and its staff, and obtain an insight into the theology and strategy of missions for the present period of rising nationalism and revolutionary ideology.

“Each year such candidates are expected to attend an interdenominational training conference of about six weeks’ duration (Meadville) beginning the latter part of June. Following this the Presbyterian candidates spend approximately five months in the Study Fellowship and Workshop under the direction of the Presbyterian Board.” Final appointment is made six weeks before the conclusion of the Study Fellowship, enabling both the Board and the approved candidate to evaluate the qualifications of the candidate for an assignment overseas.

The course of study for 1957 for this program, somewhat revised on the basis of two years’ experience, is called “Missionary Action in the Ecumenical Era.” The most important elements in the study program are the following — Understanding the Ecumenical Church; Understanding the Role of the Missionary in the Present World; Getting Along with Others of Different Viewpoints; Understanding the World Revolution and Its Implications; Learning About Areas and Peoples; Biblical Theology and The Christian Approach to non-Christians. It will be seen that these are subjects closely related to each other, with some overlapping. Moreover, the listing does not necessarily indicate the order of importance. But taken together, the list reflects accurately the major concerns of those responsible for the planning and direction of the program.

\* “The program which has proved effective in the Study Fellowship requires a flexible curriculum geared to the trends and needs of the ecumenical mission and to contemporaneous world events. Such a curriculum is not conceived as a substitute for specialized training which only well established academic institutions can

\* The whole of this section is based upon documents of the Presbyterian Board concerning the new training program, and made available to the writer. Direct quotations from the documents are indicated by the use of quotation marks.

provide. Therefore, the Study Fellowship must develop its own distinctive program, and close proximity to an academic institution is not necessary.

"The Study project is concerned with a group experience, in which the members live, work and associate together. It is essential, therefore, that the location should enhance the group consciousness of the candidates."

A full and careful report on the Study Fellowship, prepared by the Director at the conclusion of the second year, contains an important section headed "Growth of the Candidates." He observes that "there have been changes in personality patterns." One of the strongest women candidates in the group stated, near the end of the period, "I am convinced that it is not our knowledge that counts, but our attitudes. We must go in humility and love." The director goes on to report that "there has been new insight and knowledge, there has been a growing social concern, and there has been learning at a deep level."

On the whole, those responsible for the new Presbyterian program feel that it concentrates on the subjects which are most important and timely. There is need for constant vigilance so that necessary changes and adaptations may be made. It is significant, but not surprising, that the most difficult part of the program to plan so as to meet the needs of all concerned is the Bible study. This has been the experience for five years in planning for the Meadville conference. The Presbyterian Study Fellowship, planned by one denominational board, but integrated with Meadville, is a significant venture in missionary preparation.

#### THE SCHOOL OF MISSIONS OF THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA.

A new course of missionary preparation, compulsory for all appointees of the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Lutheran Church, will begin its first term in Chicago in the autumn of 1957. The paragraphs below are quoted from the printed pamphlet issued by the School in the spring of 1957.

"The School of Missions of the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary is an academic training institution on the graduate level sponsored jointly by the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Lutheran Church and by the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary. The School is intended primarily to *provide pre-field training*

for new missionaries under appointment by the Board of Foreign Missions. Within the limits of its capacity the school also serves missionary appointees of boards other than the United Lutheran Church in America and missionaries returning home for furlough study in the United States, who are enrolled in the Division of Graduate Studies of this seminary.

"Members of the school, both students and faculty, function as a resident community within the seminary, taking part in seminary activities but also possessing a corporate spiritual life centered in their common missionary vocation. By means of a program of corporate worship and study, living and sharing, individuals will not only deepen the personal spiritual resources necessary to the fulfillment of their vocational objective, but also gain that degree of theoretical knowledge and practical understanding requisite for their approach to the missionary task today.

"The School does more than provide a mere practical orientation to the contemporary missionary situation. The program of study has been set up on a sound academic basis which approaches the missionary task and vocation through the traditional theological disciplines as well as through the contributions of the secular sciences. Missionary perspectives on the study of the Bible, Church History, and Systematic Theology serve as the norm against which the student may assess and evaluate the finding of social anthropology and comparative religion. The academic training is rounded out by giving attention to evangelistic method and strategy, the life and growth of the Younger Churches, and the contemporary scene in the lands of the Younger Churches.

"Location of the School of Missions in the metropolitan Chicago area offers distinct advantages for the enrichment of the missionary training experience. Among these are access to the study facilities of major universities as well as the prospect of mutually beneficial interchange with mission specialists serving in the many seminaries of the Chicago area. The curriculum will be supplemented by topical presentations given at intervals by guest lecturers, both resident American scholars and visitors from Europe or the lands of the Younger Churches. Participation in an actual experience of evangelism through local church extension projects can provide valuable additional background for the trainee.

"Bona fide missionary appointees of the Board of Foreign Missions of The United Lutheran Church in America will normally be

referred to the School by the board. The basic course for all missionary appointees is one academic year, covering fall, winter and spring quarters. The entire year's course is planned as a single, self-contained unit. Parallel curricula have been established for theological graduates and for lay missionary appointees, including wives."

A resident faculty of three, including the Dean of the School, has been appointed. Inasmuch as this new school is not yet in operation, this paper can only describe the plan to be followed. The plan differs in many ways from the Presbyterian Study Fellowship, and while some of its objectives are the same, others are different. While both of the new training programs described above have been implemented primarily for the appointees of the boards responsible, a few candidates of other boards will be accepted if there is accommodation for them.

#### OTHER ORIENTATION PROGRAMS FOR MISSIONARIES

It would not be possible, or desirable here, to list *all* the various missionary training courses and programs begun in recent years. What is significant is that there are more courses in existence than ever before, and new ones being added each year. Every denomination needs to brief its new missionaries on board procedures, travel regulations, and give guidance about writing to supporting churches. But this kind of procedural briefing is more and more being combined with area studies and lectures on the modern missionary task leadership usually being provided by missionaries on furlough and board secretaries. In some cases, the program lasts for about a week, and in others for three to four weeks. In Canada, new appointees of several boards attend the Toronto Institute of Linguistics in June, and those related to boards cooperating in the Canadian School of Missions proceed to an interdenominational outgoing conference in July.

While the length and the organization of the orientation programs may differ considerably, all the courses aim to prepare young people psychologically for the situation into which they are going. A generation ago, the emphasis would have been largely on giving as much relevant *information* as possible in the time available.

#### AREA AND OTHER STUDIES IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES.

Mention must be made of resources for missionary training available in the area study programs of many universities. The num-

ber of such courses is constantly increasing. While the universities have not planned the new courses for missionary candidates, the increase in area course offerings is due to the rapid development of relationships between the United States and the people of other countries. It is important that missionary leaders be aware that these courses are available and that where possible such resources be utilized, either by encouraging missionary candidates to select area courses where they are offered, or by inviting university teachers to lecture at missionary training centers.

#### THE NEW MISSIONARY SITUATION, AND THE ROLE OF THE AMERICAN MISSIONARY

In the period since the end of World War II, the role of the American missionary has changed in a number of ways. It is not surprising that it should take some time to understand and to define this new role, which, of course, will continue to change. Nor is it strange that the kind of missionary training, or preparation, to equip the American missionary for his role should evolve gradually. That a new kind of training is beginning to evolve is evident from what is contained in the preceding paragraphs.

The American share in the world mission of the Protestant Churches is now very large. The newly assumed responsibility of American missionary organizations inevitably affects the role of the individual missionary. American Protestant missionaries now constitute two thirds of the force at work in the world, as compared with one third about forty years ago. The numbers of European missionaries have diminished, largely because of limitation of financial resources. Because of this, relationships between American and European missionaries, and of both groups with indigenous churches, require imaginative attitudes and actions. Again, the power of the United States in world affairs, and the magnitude of the financial resources controlled by American missionary boards, require an attitude of humility on the part of the American missionary.

The existence of the indigenous churches, sometimes strong, but not always well organized, suggests putting some brake upon American activism and the tendency to organize things, which is not easy for young and enthusiastic American missionaries. The political relationships between the United States and the missionary's host country need to be understood so that the guest may be

wisely guided in his speech and actions.

A feature of the present world situation, bearing upon the work and the role of the modern missionary, is its prevailing instability. An experienced missionary administrator who recently spent five months in Asia remarked on his return to New York that he sensed in every country visited a certain atmosphere of tension and instability, quite different from that prevailing in America. Fifty years ago, the missionary had few of the material amenities associated with western civilization. He may have lived in danger of political uprising in Africa or Asia, but such political disturbances were a passing phase, for the missionary was under the reliable protection of some imperial power. Life was more rugged than now, but the missionary knew what he was up against. All this has changed. The missionary going to most parts of the world must realize that political and other conditions beyond his control may at any time cut short his opportunity for witness and service. Nothing undermines solid work more than uncertainty, yet the modern missionary must be prepared to live with it. It would not be responsible for those engaged in the training of missionaries to fail to reckon with this atmosphere of uncertainty, and try to prepare new missionaries to face up to it.

#### **NEW AGREEMENTS ABOUT MISSIONARY PREPARATION**

Missionary preparation, as defined at the Willingen International Missionary Council conference in 1952, includes three stages. The first is all that the missionary can learn before he leaves his home country, the second is his first term abroad and the third is continued learning for the rest of his life. There is increasing emphasis in North America upon working experience, in addition to academic and professional training. As a result many missionaries go out aged thirty or over, married and with children. Mission boards require the very best professional and technical preparation for their candidates. Therefore, the specialized missionary training must be in addition to all necessary professional courses.

The academic institutions established in the past as missionary training institutions have not, in general, made sufficiently radical changes in curricula to prepare candidates for new situations. A number of mission board secretaries feel that such institutions have not emphasized sufficiently the spiritual development of candidates, the understanding of today's world and above all the com-

munication of the Gospel.

It will be necessary to review and make adaptations in the new training programs. It is important to integrate, as far as possible, the orientation programs planned by mission boards with facilities available in universities and theological colleges. Mission agencies should not attempt what academic institutions can do better, nor should missions expect universities to take responsibility which only an evangelical agency can discharge. Another important aspect of the missionary training program which each mission agency must study on behalf of its candidates is the proper balance between the technical aspects of preparation, such as area and language studies and the spiritual preparation through Bible study and how to communicate the Gospel. Again, it is well to recognize that there are limits to what can be told by word of mouth about conditions abroad. Some things can only be learned by experience. When to stop the teaching program in the home country, and to begin the experience abroad calls for wise planning, and right decisions in individual cases.

Those responsible for planning programs of missionary training must never forget that the end in view is to prepare *persons* to take their part in God's work. The most important thing that any mission board ever does is to discover young people who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, and appoint them as missionaries. A board is only justified in appointing those to whom God has spoken His saving word, and who desire to share the Gospel with others. Missionary training does not deal primarily with missionary obligation. It is planned to prepare those who are already rightly motivated, though it should strengthen and deepen motivation. The length of the period of missionary preparation, and the content of the course, should always be adapted to the needs of the individual candidate. There are some common needs, but there are also individual needs. It is to be hoped that in the new training programs now in operation, or to be inaugurated, arrangements will be kept sufficiently flexible so that the mature appointees will be sent to the field without delay, while others will be given the additional training they need.

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